

CONSULAR TREATY CLEARED FOR VOTE

Senate Blocks All Moves by
Republicans to Alter It—
Approval Today Likely

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WASHINGTON, March 15—The Senate cleared the way today for approval of the United States-Soviet consular treaty by rejecting a series of Republican-sponsored reservations.

A final vote on the three-year-old pact was put off until tomorrow. It appeared that the convention—the first bilateral treaty between the two nations—would be approved by substantially more than the required two-thirds vote.

The treaty, signed in 1964 but not brought up for Senate action until this year, has become symbolically important in the Administration's current "bridge-building" policy toward the Soviet Union.

Senate approval of the treaty would mark the first legislative endorsement of that policy.

Two Features

The treaty lays down the guidelines for resumption of consular relations between the two nations, broked off in 1948. Basically it follows the pattern of other consular conventions, but it has two distinctive features.

One provision, incorporated for the first time in any consular agreement signed by the United States, extends from criminal charges immunity to officials and employes of consulates. Much of the controversy over the treaty has focused on this provision, which opponents say would provide protection for Soviet spies.

The other distinctive provision establishes strict rules of consular notification and access for Americans arrested in the Soviet Union. This measure has been emphasized by the Administration as necessary for the protection of the growing num-

ber of American tourists visiting the Soviet Union—18,000 last year.

By decisive votes today, the Senate rejected conservative Republican reservations that would have made implementation of the treaty contingent upon an end to Soviet military aid to Vietnam.

Administration spokesmen held a majority together with the argument that the effect of the reservations might be to kill the treaty by provoking the Soviet Union into rejection of the convention. The Soviet, too, has not yet ratified the pact.

The Administration's closest call came not on a reservation but on an understanding offered by Margaret Chase Smith, Republican of Maine.

This expressed the hope of the Senate that before the United States consented to the opening of any Soviet consulate an "honorable conclusion" would be achieved in the Vietnam conflict. The understanding was defeated by a 51-38 vote.

Basically, the treaty has become a test of the willingness of the United States to make a conciliatory gesture toward the Soviet Union despite the Vietnam war.

The Central Issue

As the week-long debate on it reached a climax today, Vietnam became the central issue. A small opposition group—largely from conservative Republican ranks—argued that now, when Soviet arms supplied to North Vietnam were killing American troops in Vietnam, was not a propitious time to make a friendly gesture toward the Soviet.

One of the Republican reservations, offered by Karl E. Mundt, Republican of South Dakota, specified that the treaty not be ratified until the President reported to Congress that United States forces were no longer needed for combat in Vietnam or assured Congress that removal of United States forces was not being prevented or delayed by Soviet military assistance to North Vietnam. It was defeated 67 to 25.

By 70 to 20 the Senate rejected a reservation offered by Carl T. Curtis, Republican of Nebraska. It would have pre-

vented ratification until the President, after consultation with the Joint Chiefs of Staff, reported to Congress that the Soviet had ceased "all military support and assistance of any kind, directly or indirectly, to North Vietnam."

The Senate then went on to defeat, 68 to 24, a reservation by Strom Thurmond, Republican of South Carolina. It would have specified that nothing in the convention "shall be construed as in any way diminishing, abridging or weakening the right of the United States to safeguard its own security."

By agreement, the Senate leadership saved until the last what it realized could be the most ticklish political issue—the understanding offered by Senator Smith.

With her customary red rose pinned to her dress, Mrs. Smith argued that her proposal was

simply an expression of hope for peace in Vietnam and that unlike the reservations, it in no way affected or reinterpreted the language of the treaty or its terms of ratification.

As he has done in counter-acting all the amendments and reservations, the Democratic leader, Mike Mansfield of Montana, produced another letter

from Secretary of State Dean Rusk warning that adoption of the understanding might jeopardize Soviet ratification and the possibility that the So-

viet Union would ratify with its own understandings.

Saying the Soviet could "fabricate many reasons" for re-

jecting the treaty, Senator Smith asked:

"Are we to act in such fear of the Soviet Union?"

"God forbid that fear of the Soviet Union has reached a point in the Senate of the United States where we do not have the courage to proclaim the plain truth and express a hope for peace in Vietnam."